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REMARKS

In the office action, the Examiner reopened prosecution and set forth new grounds in rejecting claims 1-9 and 11-13, objecting to claim 10, and allowing claims 14-19. Claims 1-3, 5-9, and 11-13 were rejected as obvious in light of U.S. Patent No. 7,100,694 to Legras, et al. ("Legras") in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,472,614 to Dupont et al. ("Dupont"). Claim 4 was rejected as obvious in light of Legras in combination with Dupont and U.S. Patent No. 5,275,510 to de Baan, et al. ("de Baan"). Legras and Dupont have not previously been considered.

Applicant appreciates the opportunity to interview the Examiner on May 9, 2007 to discuss the amendments and remarks set forth herein along with the Examiner's indication of allowability in light of the amendments and remarks. As discussed further below, the prior art does not teach or suggest a variable buoyancy device capable of supporting steel catenary risers and maintaining the substantially vertical orientation of the hybrid riser tower.

Rejection of claims 1-9 and 11-13

Claims 1-3, 5-9, and 11-13 were rejected as unpatentable over Legras in view of Dupont. The Examiner stated that Legras discloses each element of the claimed invention, "but does not disclose the umbilicals to be steel catenary risers." Applicant respectfully traverses the rejection and requests reconsideration based on the amendments and remarks set forth herein.

Claim 1 of the application recites, among other things, a hybrid riser tower, a variable buoyancy device, one or more steel catenary risers (SCRs) attached at their upper ends to the variable buoyancy device, which is capable of supporting the tower and the SCRs. Legras discloses a hybrid riser tower having a vertical tower portion, a buoy, injection and production umbilicals, and flexible jumpers. *See* Legras, col. 3, ll. 29-47; col. 4, ll. 9-12; FIG. 1: 112, 124, 132; *and* FIG. 2: 207, 212, 210. While Legras has these elements, it fails to teach or suggest a "variable buoyancy device... capable of maintaining said hybrid riser tower in a substantially vertical orientation

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and capable of supporting the one or more steel catenary risers.” The buoy of Legras serves only a single function: to support the riser tower. *See* Legras, col. 3, ll. 35-40. As such, Legras fails to teach or suggest all of the elements recited in the present application.

Furthermore, while Dupont teaches an internal configuration for umbilicals and the possibility of wrapping the umbilicals with steel, it fails to disclose a buoy or a variable buoyancy device and SCRs. *See* Dupont, col. 1, ll. 7-10. Neither Legras or Dupont is directed to the use of a variable buoyancy device to support a hybrid riser tower and SCRs. Since the combined references fail to teach or suggest, alone or in combination, a “variable buoyancy device ... capable of maintaining said hybrid riser tower in a substantially vertical orientation and capable of supporting the one or more steel catenary risers” as recited in the amended claim 1, allowance of amended claim 1 is earnestly solicited.

Additionally, it would not have been obvious to the skilled artisan to arrive at the invention from the teachings of Legras and Dupont. The buoy of Legras is incapable of supporting SCRs and neither Legras nor Dupont teach, suggest, or motivate a person of ordinary skill in the art to modify the buoy of Legras to perform the dual function disclosed in the present application.

Allowance of all of the remaining rejected claims is earnestly solicited based on the amendments and remarks set forth above. Because amended claims 2-3, 5-8, and 11-13 all depend from amended claim 1, they are believed to be allowable over the cited prior art. As such, Applicant respectfully requests allowance of claims 1-3, 5-8, and 11-13.

Claim 4 was further rejected over de Baan for its teaching of a fluid transfer system. However, de Baan also fails to disclose the use of a variable buoyancy device in combination with a riser tower and SCRs. As such, claim 4 is believed to be patentable over the combination of Legras, Dupont, and de Baan. Hence, Applicant respectfully requests allowance of claim 4.

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Objection to claim 10

The objection to claim 10 is respectfully traversed based on the reasons for allowance of claim 1 from which amended claim 10 depends.

A notice of allowance of all claims is respectfully requested.

New claim 20

New claim 20 is supported in the specification by at least paragraph [0031] and FIG. 7.

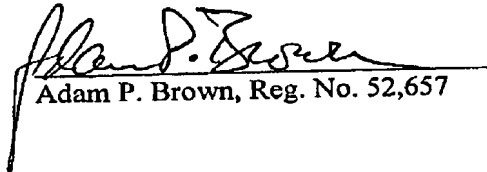
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MAY 11 2007CONCLUSION

In view of the remarks and amendments set forth above, Applicant respectfully requests withdrawal of the Examiner's rejections and objections and allowance of all presented claims, claims 1-8, 10-13, 20, and currently allowed claims 14-19. It is believed that the new claim does not require additional fees, but in the event additional fees are necessary, permission to charge deposit account 05-1328 is granted. The application and submission of the fees for the one month extension have been set forth in a separate, accompanying document.

If the Examiner believes that a telephonic interview will help advance the application, the Examiner is invited to contact the undersigned at the telephone number listed below.

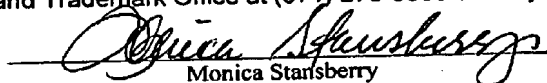
Respectfully submitted,

  
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I hereby certify that this correspondence is being transmitted via facsimile to Examiner Beach, United States Patent and Trademark Office at (571) 273-8300 on May 11, 2007.

  
Monica Starberry